

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians : Genesis, Chapter the 7th.

UNIVERSAL DELUGE.

THE highest delight of theology is the destruction of the beauty, order, and harmony of the universe. A world regularly existing from all eternity, and continuing so to exist through an endless futurity, would be in the estimation of supernatural theology, an object of disgust. To nourish the superstitious pride and folly of man, it is necessary to derange, overturn and destroy the splendid beauties and majestic grandeur of the vast empire of nature. Not content with the scheme of prediction, whose fulfilment included the ultimate dissolution of the earth, superstition conceived it was necessary to re-trace and discover in the history of past ages, an event equally distressing and terrific. For this purpose the story of the universal deluge was contrived, in which all the animals on the surface of the earth, a select number only excepted, fell a sacrifice to the vindictive vengeance of the Jewish God. The nature and details of this story, are exposed to strong objections, and by an examination of the bible account, the inconsistency and even impossibility of the case will be discovered. It will also appear by recurrence to the law of nature, that such an event is in no shape whatever, deserving of human credence. The law of fluids and the deficiency of water render it physically impossible, that the whole globe should be overflowed at one and the same time. It is well known, that water always seeks its level; where the equilibrium is destroyed, there will be instantly a powerful effort to restore it. If, therefore, the water was elevated

sufficiently high to cover the highest mountains, the seas would become dry, a vast cavity would be formed below, and the waters would be precipitated with inconceivable fury and force, to supply the cavities below, and establish the consistent harmony of nature. The mountains of Andes, in South America, by far the most exalted land on the surface of the earth, is at the point of Chimberazo, twenty thousand feet above the common surface of the ocean. There is, therefore, a great deficiency of water, to answer the purpose of an universal deluge. For as by the law of fluids, water uniformly seeks its level, it is necessary that all around the globe, the water should be raised twenty thousand feet, otherwise the American Andes would not have been covered, and the deluge would not have been universal. Let any one calculate what a vast quantity of water would have been necessary to have covered the whole earth to such a height, and he will soon discover the absurdity of this marvellous account, and still more marvellous event related in the book of Genesis. To say that God created such a vast body of water for the sole purpose of drowning the world, and all the creatures which he made in it, and afterwards annihilate it, is to assert in the first place, that which is impossible, and throw upon the moral character of God, a sarcasm, at which man ought to be ashamed—at which he ought to blush and be confounded. The account which is given of the deluge, subjects itself to strong suspicion of incorrectness and want of truth. It is impossible that the ark or any other vessel, that ever was built, could have contained all the animals which are said to have taken refuge in it. This ark, according to the bible description of it, was in length, about five hundred and twenty-five feet—in breadth, eighty-seven and a half feet, and in height, fifty-two and an half feet. It is easy to perceive, that a vessel of such dimensions had not the capacity of containing the numbers, and all the various kinds of animals which are said to have been rescued from the fatal effects of this general deluge. It is in vain that the advocates of this wonderful event fly to miracles, or the operations of supernatural powers. Miracle on miracle, must have been performed, the nature of things perverted, her laws wholly changed, and the immutability of the divine character completely annihilated, before it could be possible for the human mind to accede to the truth of this marvellous event. Some curious and philosophical observations concerning the deluge, taken from Emmerson, a British writer, are here subjoined: “Concerning the cause of this flood, some suppose it brought about by natural causes; and others, by nothing less than a

divine power. Those that are for natural causes, imagine a comet to have passed near the earth at that time; and by its approach to have raised a very strong tide, which would increase as the comet approached the earth. The effect of this would be, that this great tide would lay all places under water, and would consequently drown all the inhabitants so far as it reached. That such a cause as this is capable of producing this dismal effect, is very evident. For if so small a body as the moon, at the distance of sixty of the earth's semi-diameters, be able to raise a strong tide in the ocean, of twelve or fifteen feet high, a comet as big as the earth, and coming very near it, would raise a prodigious tide capable of overflowing all that side of the earth, which is next to the comet, and also the opposite side. But then this could not drown all places at once; for at the quadratures, or in those places which have the comet in their horizon, they would have as great an ebb, but then it would have this effect, to overflow and drown all places successively. For this huge spheroid of water, always pointing towards the comet, would by the earth's rotation, pass over all the countries of the world—and therefore, in the space of twenty-four hours the whole earth would be involved in water; and all animals as effectually destroyed, as if the water staid one hundred and fifty days upon the face of the earth; especially as the earth must needs make several rotations after this manner, before it could get clear of this disturbing force of the comet. The natural and necessary effect of all this would be, that by such a prodigious and rapid motion of this vast body of water round the earth in twenty-four hours, all plants and trees must be torn up by the roots, and carried along with the current; all buildings demolished—the rocks, hills and mountains dashed to pieces, and torn away—all the product of the sea, as fishes, shells, teeth, bones, &c. carried along with the flood, and thrown upon the earth, or even to the tops of the mountains, promiscuously with other bodies; hardly any thing could be found strong enough to withstand its force. In such a case as this, it would be impossible for any ark to live, or the strongest man of war to exist upon the surface of the ocean." The arguments, physical and moral against an event of this kind, are strong and conclusive.—Nature is incompetent to any such exhibition, and the moral perfections of deity forbid it. The flood is therefore a chimera, and one of the theological errors contained in the bible system of religion. If no other errors of greater magnitude or more pernicious consequences were to be found

in this *holy book*, it would be an object rather of pleasant amusement, than of severe remark and condemnation.

[The foregoing comment is taken from the editor's *Principles of Nature*, and as it contains many of the remarks which would have resulted, from a re-examination of the seventh chapter of Genesis, and as it is presumed that many of our subscribers have not read the work, it was deemed proper and consistent to make the extract.]

COMMUNICATION.

O N S C I E N C E.

SCIENCE gives activity to the human mind, expands the intellect, raises and exalts the understanding: the scientific character is placed above all vulgar prejudice, he surveys the wonders of creation with an inquisitive eye—he beholds the order and regularity of the different planets—studies the laws by which they are governed, and admires the wisdom of the great author of nature, displayed in all his wondrous works. 'Tis owing to science that men are enabled to throw off the shackles of prejudice, divest themselves of the trammels of superstition, and erect the religion of *nature* on the firm basis of truth. To science we owe the dissipation of *error*, the extension of human happiness, and the consequent prevalence of *liberty*. 'Tis the object of tyrants to keep their subjects in blindness, to make ignorance the subject of panygeric, and science that of contempt. They endeavour to create prejudice in all minds against it; the literati they hold up as men devoid of principle or of virtue, for well do they know that as soon as the mind is enlightened their power receives a deadly blow. The annihilation thereof is the consequence they expect if men are suffered to think for themselves, to investigate the conduct and motives of their rulers. If we examine history, if we study the progress of mankind from the barbarous to the civilized state, we shall immediately discover that as men are involved in ignorance and superstition, they are subjected to the uncontrouled force of tyrannic sway: a tyrant rules them with a rod of iron or thunders over their heads the terrors of excommunication and eternal misery:—The impostors who have governed mankind, were well acquainted with this. Zoroaster, Mahomet,

and Christ, owe their success to the universal prevalence of ignorance. The power of the Pope depended altogether upon the ignorance and superstition of the people, it was owing to this cause that he could denounce vengeance against his enemies, and hurl his anathemas and excommunications against both the princes and their subjects. The catholics buried in the profoundest ignorance, believing that if he pronounced judgment upon them, their eternal doom was fixed, that his was the power to exalt them to heaven, or make them undergo eternal misery. The clergy have always found it to their advantage to keep the people in utter ignorance, and it has been a part of their profession from those of Apollo to the present day; but happily for mankind they have not been latterly so successful, learning has revived, philosophy has burst asunder the bands of prejudice, dissipated error, promoted happiness, and enabled the votaries of science to behold with astonishment the degradation of their species.

Many and important advantages have been derived therefrom—it was owing to science that the enlightened mind of Columbus gave to the astonished eye of Europe the western hemisphere, his expansive mind was thereby capacitated to conceive and execute a design that has changed the condition and situation of half the inhabitants of the globe. 'Tis owing to science that mankind are enabled to draw down the lightning from the clouds and conduct it harmless to the earth—to it we owe the extention of commerce, the progress of civilization and the increase of humanity—by it we are enabled to assume almost a portion of the divinity to create earthquakes, to decompose and recombine, to pursue our way over the pathless ocean, and to ride on the wings of the wind.

A SUBSCRIBER.

STRICTURES ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THEY that can take for granted that the books of the New Testament must needs have been genuine, and could not possibly be corrupted, may as well take for granted, that transubstantiation and the forgiveness of sins by a priest, must have

been a doctrine originally from heaven, and could not possibly otherwise be received in the church—because we cannot fix the precise time, and manner, when, where, and how the impositions begun, and were carried on. The church who has a piercing eye to her own advantage, taking what care she could to conceal those things.

Before printing was found out and practised, it was much more easy to impose on the world than now—notwithstanding which, many new falsehoods are invented, and pass for truth, at least with a party—for there is a willingness in partial men to believe whatever tends to promote their sect or faction.

The holy Roman church knew, that when her holy secrets came to be public, they would be despised as not able to stand a rational scrutiny. And therefore though she could not prevent what has happened, she ever has, and yet does take all possible care, how, where and when, and to whom the privilege of reading the scriptures is allowed, for nothing vexes the old lady more, than that her secret debaucheries be publicly talked of by those that have examined her facts—for by her lies and impositions she has debauched the common sense of mankind. She never permitted the scriptures to be read in the common tongue, by persons of common understanding, but only by such faithful sons as she can confide in, such as are fit to carry on her cheat, or by some devout religious persons, with reverence, secrecy, and silence, such as, if I may be allowed to speak in the Mahometan phrase, have had their senses ravished away by the holy ghost—or in St. Paul's, by such as know not whether they are in the body natural, or out of it, but know themselves to be in the body spiritual—that is, in the body of the church, such as have express licence to read the scriptures by their priests and confessors, that are humble enough to be stupid, devout dunghill souls that presume not to be wise above what is permitted—never presuming to contend, controul, or talk of their own sense of scripture, or have any, having laid it all down at the threshold of the holy church.—The scripture being, as St. Ambrose calls it, *liber sacerdotilis*, the book of priests. It is the church's tree of knowledge, that is by a Romish interdiction not to be touched in common, on pain of death and damnation.

'Tis confessed by Mr. Dodwell, that the books of the New Testament did not publicly exist 'till at least one hundred years after christ. And if they had no public exist-

ence till then, how can it be proved they had any private one before. And afterwards they were to be found only in the hands of ecclesiastics, 'till the third and fourth century, men were more subtle than simple—more romantic inventors than righteous enquirers—and they that were simple, were more credulous than wise. Here was time enough for the work of fraud and imposture. And when christians became to be invested with power by Constantine, they established what they thought fit.

What authority have we, believers, for the truth of the scriptures, but the scriptures themselves? Can any history prove itself? Were not the christian writers in the early ages of christianity notorious for lies and forgeries? For fathering spurious pieces on Jesus Christ and his apostles, and successors? Have not latter christians thrown out a multitude of books for Apocryphal, which the earliest christians believed and read in their churches? There is a fine catalogue of them in Toland's *Amyntor*. Among the books anciently received by christians, some are as foolish as others are romantic, viz. The pastor of Hermas, the gospel of the infancy of Jesus, the gospel of Nicodemus, to which may be added, the unintelligible revelations of some saints, particularly that fathered on St. John the Divine may be compared for truth, but not for wit, with Don Quixote de la Mancha, or Don Quevedo's visions of hell. If believers in the infancy of christianity believed such romance, what reason have we to believe them, if reason should guide us? If reason is not to be our guide, how came we to be wiser than they? Or how can we know in what respects they were right, when they were wrong in so many?

If such authority is wanting to the gospels themselves, as ought to be given to establish their veracity unquestionable, as certainly it is; I cannot see how St. Paul's epistles can be more authentic than those, unless the servant is above his lord: therefore the christian tradition is the least of all histories to be regarded for genuine and uncorrupted truth.

It is no wonder if this honorable author, who is an elegant writer and subtle reasoner, but a superficial enquirer, could gloss over St. Paul in so shining a manner, who was so famed an apostle, that the rest are confessed to be all blockheads and fools to him. The men I contend with are men of parts and learning, I scorn to attack a fool; but it is not my learning or parts that gives me the victory, but the truth appears so evidently on my side, that it requires little

of either in me to display and vindicate it. 'Tis no wonder if these gentlemen can defend what custom has established, when even I taught by them, and therefore a novice to these masters of art, can give such reasons to prove Robinson Crusoe a true history, as they themselves, by their own arguments, might not be able to disprove, if they did not know it to be otherwise.

The reasons that may be given to render Robinson Crusoe a true history are these, the writer appears to be neither an impostor nor an enthusiast from any part of the story—and to have had no design to pervert the reason of mankind, or impose on men's understandings—or to propagate a new religion in the world, in order to make himself head of a sect. It contains no contradictions or absurdities—nothing impossible or improbable or romantic—when, where, by whom, or in what language it was first written, is better known than the books of the New Testament. The genuineness and authority of it was never questioned, nor denied. No book was ever wrote to disprove it, though this history came forth at a time when every thing that has but the least appearance of falsehood is opposed. P. A.

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